

St. John, the Evangelist; the Great Patron
of Freemasonry.

A SERMON,

PREACHED BEFORE THE MEMBERS OF

New Caledonia Lodge,

ON St. JOHN'S DAY, DECEMBER 27. 1869.

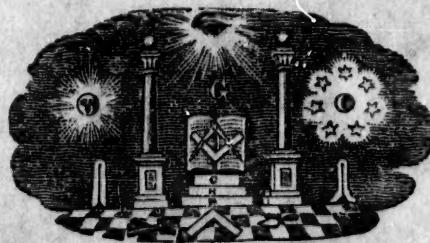
In St. James' Church, Pictou, N. S.

BY

THE REV. HENRY GENEVER,

CURATE (IN CHARGE) OF ST. JAMES', AND CHAPLAIN TO THE LODGE.

PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF THE LODGE.



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ST. JOHN CHAP. XXI. 7.

"THE DISCIPLE WHOM JESUS LOVED."

This day is the day set apart by our Church for perpetuating the memory of St. John the Evangelist; the loving and beloved disciple of our blessed Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. But it is chiefly as Masons that we assemble here to day, to keep the solemn festival, which Masons are accustomed to set apart, to commemorate the anniversary of the great patron of their order, this very same St. John the Evangelist. One, whose name and teachings, have, it is said, for eighteen centuries, been inseparably interwoven with the Masonic institution, and become domesticated as it were, in the Masonic family. To his memory, and that of St. John the Baptist, Masons professing Christianity, have for a long period of time consecrated their Lodges. This fact is, of course, familiar to the mind of every brother, however inexperienced; but the especial object of such a dedication, the causes which lead to it, and particularly, the importance of its bearing upon the nature, designs, and dignity of Freemasonry, is perhaps not so clearly seen, nor so highly studied and appreciated, even with the brightest and best of us, as it might be. To the sincere and intelligent Mason the memory and life of the "Holy Evangelist" are eloquent with solemn admonitions, and stand forth as imperishable records of the duties and responsibilities of each of us. They indicate with unerring light the leading features of our society,—illustrate the purposes we are engaged to accomplish,—and shed wherever the sound of the gavel is heard, the lustre of his benign character upon the rituals and ceremonies of our order. And although that "loved disciple," upon "the burthen of whose every discourse," as has been beautifully remarked, "there is personified the embodiment, and poured out, the very soul of Masonry," has long since passed away from the scenes of his Christian battlefields, and the floor of his Masonic temples, yet he still symbolically remains amongst us; the echo of his voice still lingers around our varied emblems, allegories, and

hieroglyphics, and to assist in perpetuating his inspired teachings, and to unite in practising his exalted virtues, did Masonry first adopt him as her Patron, and dedicate her Lodges to his memory.

The Day, and the Saint then, are alike interesting to Christians and Masons. To Christians, he is "the disciple whom Jesus loved," the ablest and clearest exponent of their creed, the most successful and valiant defender of their faith. To Masons, he is the Patron of their order, and the pattern of their lives.

Let us glance then at St. John's character as given us by divine inspiration, pointing out some of those features which distinguish him as "the disciple whom Jesus loved;" and as we pass on, notice the appropriateness of Masons making him their Patron, and the duties which devolve upon them in their obligation to imitate him.

I. And first, we notice the readiness with which he and his brother James forsook their earthly calling and friends, at the command of their Lord and Master. In Matt. iv. 21, we read "*And Jesus going from thence*," that is, from the place where he had just before called Peter and Andrew, "*saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. And they immediately left the ship, and their father, and followed him.*" Their minds had been prepared for the advent of the Messiah, by the preaching of St. John the Baptist—the other great Patron of Masonry—who, indeed, we are told, had pointed him out to Andrew, and another disciple, not improbably the Evangelist himself,—as the Lamb of God. Upon his appearance and call, therefore, they readily received and obeyed him, laying the foundation of the Christian building in the renunciation of the world, as a supreme object of pursuit, affection, and worship. And here, it always must be laid by every Christian who is desirous of being the *disciple whom Jesus loves*. All are not called to forsake their earthly calling and occupation, and to commence the public preaching of God's revealed and saving truth, as the Apostles were, Christ having appointed in his Church a regular way now of entering into the ministry; but every Christian is called to be ready, in heart and mind, to quit at once and forever all that comes in competition with duty, and to follow the Saviour in the path of holy living.

And no less is it the duty of every true Mason, to follow the bright example of our Patron,—if indeed he would be a *disciple-follower*, a *Mason*, whom the Great Master, the Great Creator and Architect of the Universe, *shall love*; to rise at once at the Great Master's call, typified by the earthly Master, to the performance of all those duties, and the attainment of all those virtues, which Masonry teaches and enjoins. To yield up at once, and desist from the practice of every evil; to publish and extend Freemasonry by making its principles and power manifest in their lives; to start on that course and *rule* of life, enclosed within "the two parallel lines," on which rests that "Great Light in Masonry" the Holy Scriptures, which will guide unto all truth; which will direct their

feet to the temple of happiness here, and safely and surely lead them to the Great Temple above.

II. When our Lord gave his Apostles their commission to preach the Gospel, he surnamed our Patron Evangelist, and his brother James, "*Boanerges*," that is "Sons of Thunder." And thereby he intimated their determined zeal in his cause, and the powerful effects of their preaching that *word*, which is frequently compared to thunder; being, like that, the voice of God speaking from heaven, mighty in its operation. If the one shake the earth, throw down mighty trees and lofty towers, and by the lightening which precedes and produces it, penetrates and dissolves the hardest substances; the other shakes the empire of sin and evil, casting down everything which exalts itself against heaven, and withering and consuming the corruption of the human heart.

Here is an example of zeal and determination in the cause and service of God, to all true Christians, if they would individually aspire to being "the disciples whom Jesus loves;" and to all true Masons if they would extend the influences and principles of their order, and be worthy imitators and successors of their Patron Saint.

III. Again, Three times we hear in the Gospels "the beloved disciple" reproved by his Master, to shew us that whom the Lord "lovethe" he chasteneth and purgeth, till, like the branch of a well dressed vine, he bring forth more and better fruit. Once a spark of ambition, lighting upon the spirits of the two brothers, James and John, had suddenly inflamed them with a vehement desire of pre eminence above their apostolic brethren. Their blessed Master gave them to understand, that they, who were called to be his disciples and apostles, were called to *labour* and to *suffer* for the salvation of souls, and shou'd esteem it sufficient to be exalted, like their Great Master, in heaven, after the work was done. And are not these, not only the teachings of Christianity, but also some of the leading principles of Freemasonry, which aims at "the noble and glorious purpose of spreading the cement of brotherly-love and affection,—that cement which unites us into one sacred band, or society of friends and Brothers; among whom no contention should ever exist, but that noble contention, or rather emulation, of who best can work, and best agree."

At another time the two disciples, James and John, not bearing to see their Lord rejected by the schismatical Samaritans, were for calling fire from heaven to consume them, after the example of the prophet Elijah. But their Master rebuked them, telling them, "*They knew not what manner of spirit they were of, for the Son of man was come to save the lives of men, and not to destroy them.*" The present is the day of grace and mercy, long suffering and forbearance, with Christ, and it ought to be so with his disciples, within the parallels of revealed truth. And doubtless the moral effect of this rebuke influenced the after life of the beloved disciple; for while we always find him zealous in opposing error and defending the truth, we find him preaching constantly, and most

ferently, brotherly forbearance and love, with a readiness to accept and encourage every effort which in the remotest degree tended to attain any of the ends at which he aimed. His accepting the Grand Mastership of Freemasonry, if so he did, being a remarkable instance of this. Which being a merely human institution, and aiming at human results, is still so far in unison with that greater, higher, that divine institution of human regeneration and salvation, of which he was so distinguished an Apostle and Teacher.

And the Third reproof which St. John met with from his Master, which partook somewhat of the same nature as the last, was for forbidding a person to cast out devils in Christ's name, because he followed not them. No emulation or jealousy should prevent our encouraging every man to do good, although he act and think not in all points as we do, or as we could wish him to do. Whatever real good he does, it is God who disposes and enables him to do it; and in time that same God may reveal all other needful and desirable things to him: towards which, we ourselves, by treating such an one with tenderness and kindness, may be made instrumental.

But these offences of St. John's being,—upon Christ's admonition,—repented of and forsaken, they depriv'd not the "beloved disciple" of the place he had obtained in his Lord's favour. For at the last supper we find him sitting next to Jesus, and reclining on his breast; as it is the privilege of every beloved disciple now, to pour out all his complaints into the Bosom of his Redeemer, who is still always ready to hear, always mighty to save.

IV. And then, St. John, our Patron, was one of the sacred three to whom the secrets and mysteries of revelation were committed, and he was *the one*, more than all the rest, more even than the other two, who revealed and explained them. And it is here chiefly that he is a very appropriate Patron of Masonry. Masonry like Christianity has its mysteries; and to every true Mason, like the beloved disciple, is committed knowledge and mysteries which are wisely and carefully kept from the uninitiated.

In the course of the evangelical history, we find St. John, in conjunction with St. Peter, and St. James, admitted to the knowledge and view of some more private miracles and transactions, to which even the rest of the other disciples were not admitted. These were the three who attended their Master, when he raised the daughter of Jairus from the dead. "*He suffered no man to go in, save Peter, and James, and John.*" And this is in some sense, the happy lot of every true disciple whom Jesus loves. For although he no more know Christ after the flesh, or see him working his miracles in person, as St. John did, yet, by faith, the wonders of divine love and mercy are manifested unto him; and he beholds accomplished in himself and others that great work, which the miracles of Christ were designed to represent—the work of conversion and salvation. This spiritual work, the Great Master, Jesus only can effect, and none but his beloved disciples know and understand it. The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he shews to

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them the glory of his power in *raising* a soul from sin to righteousness, no less than he shewed it to the three Apostles in *raising* the maid from death to life. And in all the circumstances of this narrative, do you not see a wonderful similarity between it and all the circumstances and mysteries connected with *raising* a candidate to the sublime degree of Master Mason.

Again, the same three disciples accompanied their Lord and Master, exclusive of all the rest, at the two most remarkable scenes of his exaltation and humiliation; that is to say, when he was transfigured upon Mount Tabor, and when he was in an agony in the garden of Gethsemane. With regard to the former we read, that "*he took Peter, and James and John, up into a high mountain, apart, and was transfigured before them.*" There they beheld his mortal body suddenly clothed with light, as with a garment; they beheld his glory, as the glory of the only begotten; they saw the Sun of Righteousness shining in his strength; they saw Moses and Elias glorified with him, as the Law and the Prophets always appear, when seen in company with Jesus, the Great Master of whom they both spake; Moses representing the Law, and Elias representing the Prophets, and they heard the voice from heaven declaring him to be the beloved of the Father.

Again at his passion "*he taketh with him, Peter, and the two sons of Zebedee, James and John, and began to be sore amazed and very heavy.*" There they beheld him encompassed with the infirmities of man, and beset by the powers of darkness; they beheld him humbled under the load of our sins; they saw the Sun of Righteousness overcast with a dark cloud; and heard the same divine person praying in a bitter agony, as one smitten of God in his anger, and afflicted unto death.

And happy is every disciple, whom Jesus so loves as to admit him, by faith, to behold and dwell upon the contemplation of his blessed Master, in these, his two states of exaltation and humiliation; the glory of his divine, and the sufferings of his human nature. These are subjects, on which a christian can never meditate, but with infinite profit and advantage. By ascending the holy mount, and there viewing in the transfiguration of Jesus the glory of his person, and an example of that glory which he shall bestow on his saints at the resurrection, he is armed against the pain and shame of the cross, and strengthened to undergo his portion of suffering in the world. By attending the Redeemer in the garden during his agony, he learns the intolerable punishments due to sin, and the amazing love of him who would descend from Tabor to Gethsemane, to bear them for sinners; he is prepared to take up his cross, and to be conformed to Christ in suffering, from thence looking back to the glory which the Son of God hath left for a time, that he might bestow it on his "beloved disciples" for ever.

To the beloved disciple, our great Patron, then, it was permitted to behold scenes, manifestations and displays, and to have committed to his trust and keeping, secrets, truths, and mysteries, to which

others were strangers. Nay, it would seem as though he had more than all the rest combined, a greater knowledge of the mysteries of Christianity, a clearer insight into the mystical meaning of them, and more than all the rest combined he has revealed and explained them. And his Gospel is such a remarkable instance of this, that it has been called "another Gospel;" it being so unlike the other Gospels, in that its references are so extensive, its mysteries and their explanations so sublime and so profound. It is the same testimony, but, like the sun seen in the sky of Italy or Greece, compared with other parts of Europe, it is brighter and more glorious than as it appears in any of his fellow-witnesses. It is ever the same subject, the same revelation, the same truths; but in this, at once the most heart-affecting and the most sublime of the four Gospels, these truths are contemplated and represented from their greatest altitude to their lowest depths, from their inmost essence to their external aspects, from the remotest past of their existence to the endless future of their results. Hence, St. John's Gospel forms in that beautiful quartette—if we may so express it—of evangelical history and revealed truth, the *bass* of a full harmony; or, if you would rather have it—the highest copestone which terminates, completes, and crowns the well-founded and well-built fabric; the glorious Temple of Divine Truth. His Gospel with his other writings are, like the glorious Person of whom they speak, the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, the first and the last, of Divine wisdom, Divine mystery, and Divine truth. "The beloved disciple" evidently loves and labours to communicate the *first commencement*, the *earliest origin*, and in contrast and completion, the *latest result* and *end* of things. His Gospel commences with that which *was* already in the *beginning*, when the world did not exist; and the book of Revelation closes by pointing to the *consummation* of all things, with the return and reign of the Saviour. He alone gives us the *beginning* of the miracles which Jesus did, when the water was turned into wine at the marriage feast at Cana in Galilee; and he alone gives us the *last* of our Lord's miracles, the miraculous draught of fishes at the sea of Tiberias. He ever speaks in the language of a Seer, a Divine Philosopher; combining both in his historical statements, and doctrinal mysteries, the loftiest heights with the most profound depths, the nicest accuracy with the amplest freedom, the minutest precision in material details with the sublimest views in the philosophy of heaven—that is to say, in the knowledge of God and of Christ, of God's providential government, and of heaven.

His Gospel does not start, like that of St. Mark, from the baptism in Jordan; nor like St. Matthew's, from our Lord's descent from Abraham and David; nor like St. Luke's, from even Adam; but from a period *before the world was*. "*In the beginning was the Word*." And that Word, St. John explains and defines for us as it was before all things in his uncreated nature;—"it was in the *beginning with God*, and it was *GOD*." And in like manner no

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Eva-gelist has testified to the reality of our Lord's becoming man, with an expression at once of such *depth* of meaning, and of such impetuosity—and the "*Word was made flesh.*" And even in this sublime description of the pre-existence of the Word, St. John, not only reveals the truth, but opposes error. The philosophy of Plato the Greek, and subsequently of Philo the Jew, had placed a *logos*, or *Word*,—a second God (*diútheros Theos*) beside the eternal God. St. John, sifting the fundamental truth, that there was a plurality of Persons in the Godhead, from the human error, that there was a plurality of Gods, acknowledges and teaches the existence of that *Word with God*, but not as a second or fellow God; no, but as *very God*.

And notice how remarkably these features which we have asserted to exist in the character and writings of the "beloved disciple" are shewn in his Gospel,—his history of the life of his Lord and Master. He does not give us a connected narrative of our Lord's doings and sayings, but rather a choice selection of the most remarkable tokens of his divine Majesty, followed up very fully by the reflections and doctrines suggested by those wonderful occurrences, and which seem to have been mentioned chiefly for the purpose of pointing out the mysteries they symbolized, and the truths which his Master on each occasion taught. The miracle at the marriage feast of Cana is recorded not for its own sake alone, but also for the sake of the weighty words that passed between Jesus and his mother, and between them and the servants at the feast, before manifesting his glory at that place. The cure of the invalid at Bethesda having been performed on the Sabbath day, ends, in like manner, not (as repeatedly happens in the case of the other Evangelists) to a single saying, but to a whole series of statements and instructions from the Saviour respecting himself and his relation to the Father. To the account of the multiplication of the loaves, which is the only miracle recorded by the other Evangelists which St. John repeats, and which is evidently repeated for the following purpose, there is annexed the sublime doctrine taught by Jesus at Capernaum by which, leading off men's thoughts from the earthly and the visible, he bids the multitudes which were following him "labor for that meat that perisheth, to labour for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life;" and declares of himself, "*I am the bread of life.*" The opening of the eyes of the man that had been blind from his birth, is still less confined to a single statement of the miracle, and mentioned for its own sake; but appears with all the more important circumstances attending it, and especially with all the animated dialogues that took place between Jesus and the man whom he had cured—between the latter and the Pharisees—between the Jews, and the man's parents on that occasion. The same may be said of the sublime truths taught in connection with the raising of Lazarus from the grave,—the visit of Nicodemus to our Lord by night,—the meeting with the woman of Samaria at Jacob's well, and those wonderfully touching and mystic discourses at the Last Supper.

Brethren, time fails us to notice a tith of the instances which abound in proof of our statement with regard to our great Patron, the "disciple whom Jesus loved,"—that he more than all the other disciples of our Lord, was the great repository of the mysteries of Christianity, and that he more than all the others has explained and revealed them. Both his Gospel, his First Epistle and his Book of Revelation are overwhelming witnesses of the fact.

V. There is however one other point of view in which we desire you to contemplate the "beloved disciple," and in it to discern another and very striking feature, of the appropriateness of his being the great Patron of Freemasonry. *To him was committed the care of the widow and childless.* From the cross on which the Saviour was expiring he commended his h^{ly} mother to the care of St. John, who from henceforth, happy in having an opportunity of shewing his love to his Lord, "*took her to his own home;*" where we are told she continued till her death, treated by him with the duty and affection of a son. And may not the dying Mason point his soon to be widow and orphan children to your Fraternity, and commit them to your care, in the assured confidence that you will help, protect, and relieve them? Is it not yours to bind up the broken-hearted, to rescue the helpless and the orphan from the prospect of want and ruin, and to comfort and shield the widow in afflictions hour?

Such then, are some of the features of St. John's character, marking him off as the "disciple whom Jesus loved," and shewing the appropriateness of Masons making him their Patron and Pattern.

Let us not imagine, therefore, that we are conforming to a mere idle conventionality of our Order when we commemorate his anniversary,—when we assemble, in obedience to ancient custom, to offer our yearly tribute of veneration upon the altar of Masonry, to the virtues and memory of one whose precepts and instructions are the very life blood of Masonry itself. Nor must we think our task is accomplished, our self imposed duties performed, by the attendance on a heartless and unmeaning ceremony, into which our souls and better feelings never enter, and the purposes of which we deem it unnecessary to comprehend or deliberate on. On no day more than this, should the lessons we have been taught by the "Great Lights" of Masonry, before us, more forcibly admonish us of the several and solemn duties they prescribe. On no day can our labor in the moral workshop of Masonry be more clearly defined, or the true Mason's mind be more attracted to a sense of the work designed for him upon our *moral tressel board*, than on that which assembles us together as a "a society of friends and brothers," to do honour to the name of one, who in his life was the bright exemplar of our Order, and in his death has transmitted to posterity the Freemason's creed and duty. This brethren, is what we have received from him, and as I think embodies the vitality and soul of our society. PURITY, AND UNIVERSAL LOVE OR CHARITY, VIRTUE AND UNIVERSAL BENEVOLENCE. And I need scarcely remark, that, in

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claiming to ourselves a Patron so eminently superior to ordinary men, we assume no humble ground in the scale of moral excellance. In recognizing in his life, manner, teaching, and spirit, impressive illustrations of the great duties of the brotherhood we necessarily bind ourselves to high accountability;—and in publicly undertaking to consecrate a day in reverence of his holy life, we are floating before the eyes of the uninitiated—always a critical and censorious body—the glorious banner on which is inscribed our mission and our faith. May these reflections then arise to us, and influence us, and go along with us during our Masonic journey through life, from the ceremonies and engagements to which we have to-day committed ourselves. May we be forcibly reminded thereby, that upon us depend the prosperity and value of Masonry here;—that we each have *labour* to perform, and that our *work* must *square* to meet the requirements of the *Great Overseer*. No rough imperfect *ashler* will meet with his acceptance. The same exactness of finish and proportion required for the materials of the earthly temple will be demanded of us when offering our minds “as living stones for a place in that spiritual building not made with hands.” And it is the mission of Masonry, as I understand it—to help and direct us in this all-important undertaking. She professes not, indeed, to instruct her children in any particular system of ethics, views, or creeds. But acts rather as the hand-maid of religion,—that religion which is universal, and which rests on the Two great commandments in the Law. She points to certain moral principles and laws, and guides the faltering steps of man to that ever flowing fountain from which his hopes of temporal and eternal happiness are drawn. She speaks to him in no chilling words of formal ceremony,—but she aids him in his efforts. She throws open the doors of her Lodge Rooms and welcomes the worthy to her embrace. She asks him not to *gaze* upon heartless forms, idle meetings, or unmeaning characters. With reverent awe she leads him to the *source* of her own existence, and bids him gather *strength* from the *GREAT LIGHT* before him. From thence he learns the darkness of his *moral* nature, and those great duties, the practice of which can alone enlighten him, and make him a wiser and a better man. He sees in the room in which he stands, the glorious temple of Jehovah symbolised to his mind, and his soul is startled with the remembrance that the “all-seeing eye” is on him. From the “covering,” the “furniture,” the “supports,” the “extent,” and the “ground floor” of a Lodge, its rituals and symbols, he gathers the most beautiful illustrations of Bible history and christian character. Step by step, as he progresses, he learns the “more noble and glorious purposes” to which the working tools of our ancient brethren are to be directed in the field of his moral labours. He finds gathered around him “a society of friends and brothers, among who no contention should exist,” meeting on the level of a common humanity, with a common faith, a common hope, and a common charity; bound together by the indissoluble ties of fraternal love, strengthening each others

weaknesses, and assuaging each others sorrows, gently reproofing each others failings, and extending the hand of *universal benevolence* to the whole family of man. Such are the impressions which **B** Lodge-room, is intended, is calculated, and ought to leave upon every Mason's mind. He who regards it otherwise—views it merely as a place assigned for idleness, ease, or pleasure,—to while away the monotony of an evening, or to brighten himself in the ceremonial and formal features of the order, is but *nominally* a mason—acknowledging no sympathy with the impressive teachings **of** Masonry, and is false to the obligations to which he has deliberately bound himself. *That* Freemasonry (if such there be") writes **a** distinguished Masonic Author, "which comes short of making its possessors wiser and better men—which contents itself with anything short of bringing forth from its Lodges the fruits of charity, righteousness and peace,—which fails to bring its members better acquainted with their duty to God, their country, and themselves; *such* Masonry may well question the genuineness of its teachings, and may advantageously be dispensed with. The "*Great Light*" has not shed its rays upon such a Lodge; and the sooner the tape which throws its sly and delusive glimmer around its altar is extinguished, the better will it be for all concerned, and especially for those who love the old institution in sincerity and truth."

May it be ours to realize such a beautiful ideal of a Masonic Lodge and Brotherhood.



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